



Photos by Kathy Adams Clark/Contributor

Kinkaid School student Bennett Bowman, foreground, and teacher Ryan Call search for birds at an on-campus detention pond that was turned into a nature habitat.

Kinkaid School conservation project lets nature run wild

Detention pond becomes habitat for birds, butterflies, wildflowers and native plants

By Gary Clark
CORRESPONDENT

The future of wildlife conservation is in the hands of our youth. At Kinkaid School in Piney Point Village, faculty and students are doing their part, transforming an old detention pond into habitat for birds, butterflies, dragonflies and wildflowers.

Director of strategic communication Peggy England invited my wife, Kathy Adams Clark, and me to visit the school to see the conservation project at the pond. English teacher and birder Ryan Call, environmental science teacher Jason Johnson and student Bennett Bowman, who works on the school newspaper, led us on a tour of native plants and birds in the mostly dry pond.

They didn't have to do any plant restoration because native vegetation began growing soon after the school quit mowing the pond.

The decision to maintain the 1.5-acre site in a natural state has brought remarkable results.



Swamp sparrows are one of the many interesting birds that have returned to the detention pond that now serves as an outdoor classroom for students at Kinkaid School.

More than 147 species of birds have been documented in recent years, including migratory birds, such as the American kestrel and sedge wren, which are regular wintering species. Other winter migrants include yellow-rumped warblers, American goldfinches and white-throated sparrows.

We walked down the grassy banks of the pond and along the weedy ground with its native growth of brushy and little blue stem, bluebonnets and gallardia. Cloudless sulfurs and Reakirt's blue butterflies flitted among the grasses. A small pool of water near the pond's drainage attracted dragonflies such as eastern pondhawks and black saddlebags.

Swamp sparrows darted among the low-lying bushes. A male northern cardinal kept up a constant mating call of "here-here-here, dear-dear-dear," despite the potential menace of a red-tailed hawk soaring overhead. Red-bellied woodpeckers and downy woodpeckers hammered their beaks on surrounding trees.

Nature continues on A15

younger because we have a used for a break from work. The kitchen into a cozy family room es awaiting loungers as they ing mickel cokes.



Kathy Adams Clark/Contributor

A sedge wren perches in the brush growing around the detention pond at Kinkaid School.

NATURE

From page A12

ing trees, while a foot-long pileated woodpecker called out with a boisterous “yak-yak-yak-yak.” Several of spring’s neotropical migratory songbirds will soon arrive, as indicated by past records of Baltimore orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks and scarlet tanagers. Other migrants, such as summer tanagers, painted buntings and prothonotary warblers, may breed by the pond because of its proximity to a forested corridor of Buffalo Bayou. Call conducts a birding class at the pond during the students’ winter break, and Johnson has students compare biodiversity in native plant growth. Perhaps the future of nature conservation beams brightest in the eyes of students like Johnson, who is in her junior year at Kinkaid.

Email Gary Clark at texasbirder@comcast.net. He is the author of “Book of Texas Birds,” with photography by Kathy Adams Clark (Texas A&M University Press).

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT KINKAID SCHOOL

- Kinkaid School in Piney Point Village was founded by Margaret Kinkaid in 1904.
- It’s Houston’s oldest nonsectarian and independent coeducational college prep school for students from prekindergarten through 12th grade.
- The school encompasses 34 ½ acres, including the dry 1.5-acre detention pond that’s become an important nature study area for students being guided by faculty.
- Because Kinkaid agreed to stop mowing the pond, students are discovering how nature can restore itself with native vegetation that attracts birds and other animals.